

SPEECH

OF

HON. THOMAS A. R. NELSON,
OF TENNESSEE,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 6, 1859.

Mr. GILMER, of North Carolina, having offered the following preamble and resolution:

Whereas, the circumstances and condition of the country require that the asperities and animosities which, for the last few years, have been rapidly alienating one section of the country from another, and destroying those fraternal sentiments which are the strongest supports of the Constitution, should be allayed: whereas, inasmuch as the history of the Government furnishes instances of success in giving quiet to the country by the united exertions of conservative national men, irrespective of party, there is reason to hope for a like result from similar labors: whereas, in 1851, when the minds of the people of the North and of the South were inflamed on the subject of slavery, national men appealed to the country as follows, to wit:

"The undersigned, members of the Thirty-First Congress of the United States, believing that a renewal of sectional controversy upon the subject of slavery would be both dangerous to the Union and destructive of its objects, and seeing no mode by which such controversy can be avoided, except by a strict adherence to the settlement thereof effected by the compromise acts passed at the last session of Congress, do hereby declare their intention to maintain the said settlement inviolate, and to resist all attempts to repeal or alter the acts aforesaid, unless by the general consent of the friends of the measure, and to remedy such evils, if any, as time and experience may develop.

"And for the purpose of making this resolution effective, they further declare, that they will not support for office of President or Vice President, or of Senator or of Representative in Congress, or as member of a State Legislature, any man, of whatever party, who is not known to be opposed to the disturbance of the settlement aforesaid, and to the renewal, in any form, of agitation upon the subject of slavery."

Henry Clay,
Howell Cobb,
C. S. Morehead,
William Duer,
Robert L. Rose,
H. S. Foot,
William C. Dawson,
James Brooks,
Thomas J. Rusk,
Alexander H. Stephens,
Jeremiah Clemens,
Robert Toombs,
James Cooper,
M. P. Gentry,
Thomas G. Pratt,
Henry W. Hilliard,
William M. Gwin,
F. E. McLean,
Samuel Eliot,
A. G. Watkins,
David Outlaw,
Alexander Evans,

H. A. Bullard,
C. H. Williams,
T. S. Haymond,
J. Phillips Phoenix,
A. H. Sheppard,
A. M. Schermerhorn,
David Breek,
John R. Thurman,
James L. Johnson,
D. A. Bokee,
J. B. Thompson,
George R. Andrews,
J. M. Anderson,
W. P. Manguni,
John B. Kerr,
Jeremiah Morton,
J. P. Caldwell,
R. I. Bowie,
Edmund Deberry,
E. C. Cabell,
Humphrey Marshall,
Allen F. Owen."

The effects of which on the popular mind were to induce the Democratic party in their National Convention at Baltimore, in 1852, to resolve and pledge themselves to the nation, as follows, to wit:

"That Congress has no power under the Constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several States, and that such States are the sole and proper judges of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the Constitution; that all efforts made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences; and that all such efforts have an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people and endanger the stability and permanency of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend of our political institutions.

"That the foregoing proposition covers, and was intended to embrace, the whole subject of the slavery agitation in Congress; and, therefore, the Democratic party of the Union, standing upon the national platform, will abide by and adhere to the faithful execution of the acts known as the compromise measures settled by the last Congress, the act for the reclaiming of fugitives from service included, which act being designed to carry out an express provision of the Constitution, cannot, with fidelity thereto, be repealed or so changed as to destroy or impair its efficiency.

"Resolved, That we will resist all attempts at renewing, in Congress or out of it, the slavery agitation, under whatever shape and color the attempt may be made."

And the Whig party in the same year, at the same place, resolved and pledged themselves, as follows, to wit:

"That the series of measures commonly known as the compromise, including the fugitive slave law, are acquiesced in by the Whig party of the United States, as a settlement, in principle and substance, a final settlement of the dangerous and exciting questions which they embrace; and so far as the fugitive slave law is concerned, we will maintain the same, and insist on its strict enforcement, until time and experience shall demonstrate the necessity of further legislation to guard against evasion or abuse, not impairing its present efficiency; and we deprecate all further agitation of slavery questions as dangerous to our peace, and will discountenance all efforts at the renewal or continuance of such agitation, in Congress or out of it, whatever, where-ever, or however the attempt may be made; and we will maintain this system as essential to the nationality of the Whig party, and the integrity of the Union."

Therefore resolved, That, fully indorsing these national sentiments, it is the duty of every good citizen of this Union to resist all attempts at renewing, in Congress or out of it, the slavery agitation, under whatever shape and color the attempt may be made, and that no member should be elected Speaker of this House whose political opinions are not known to conform to the foregoing sentiments—

Mr. NELSON said:

Nothing has been said, Mr. Clerk, by any gentleman in this body with respect to the resolution

offered by the gentleman from North Carolina, [Mr. GILMER,] and as he and I occupy a position here between the dominant parties of the House and country, I trust that I will be allowed—although I had hoped that it would have fallen into abler hands to do so—to say something to the House in behalf of that resolution.

I am one of those, Mr. Clerk, who believe that the resolution of the gentleman from North Carolina ought to be adopted, in preference to the resolution offered by the gentleman from Missouri, [Mr. CLARK.] I was pained to see the resolution introduced by the member from Missouri. While I go as far as any other man in the South or North to denounce that most infamous publication that has excited the attention of this House, I, for one, think—with very great deference to the sentiments that have been expressed on the other side—that we are giving too much dignity and too much importance to a most infamous publication. I, for one, am not in favor of placing Mr. Helper and his book in the same enviable notoriety that Erostratus acquired by destroying the Ephesian temple. I, for one, am opposed to damning his name to everlasting fame, by placing it on the records of this House and handing it down to an inglorious immortality. It seems to me—with great deference to the opinions of other gentlemen who have expressed different sentiments—that we are dignifying this infamous pamphlet too much by giving it the notice which it has commanded here.

I think that the resolution of the gentleman from North Carolina answers the purpose designed by the mover of the other resolution, and is more in accordance with the dignity of this House and the gravity of legislative proceedings than the resolution offered by the gentleman from Missouri. And why should we not all come up, from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South, and record our votes in favor of the resolution offered by the gentleman from North Carolina, which contains nothing that, by any legitimate construction or intentment, could be construed as wounding the feelings of any member of the House? Why will we not all vote for these resolutions? They breathe the spirit of the two great parties that have hitherto controlled, alternately, the destinies of this great country. One portion of the resolution is copied from the resolutions of the great Democratic party in 1852; another is copied from the resolutions of the Whig party in the same year. The sentiments that are avowed in the resolution of the member from North Carolina are—I respectfully submit to the gentleman from Missouri—ininitely more comprehensive than the resolution which he has offered here; because, while his resolution signalizes a particular publication, and gives it a notoriety which is altogether unworthy its nature, the resolution offered by the gentleman from North Carolina condemns the slavery agitation in every shape and form. I, for one, prefer, therefore, the resolution offered by the gentleman from North Carolina, and I earnestly insist on its adoption by this House.

There is one thing, Mr. Clerk, which I think cannot fail to have struck the mind of every patriot, and every member of this House. We meet together under most extraordinary circumstances. An event of a most exciting character

has occurred in one of the States of the Union, and it is natural that there should be a feeling of excitement on the part especially of those who represent that State on this floor. It is natural that there should be a feeling of sympathy among those of us who live in adjoining States; but at the same time, Mr. Clerk, I maintain that we may carry this feeling of excitement too far. I know that a sentiment exists on the part of a portion of the members of this House—judging, at least, from the conduct of those who represent part of the northern States—that this excitement is altogether unnecessary, that there is no cause for it, and that it better comports with their dignity and with their honor that they should not participate in the discussion which has taken place here. Permit me to say to those who entertain that sentiment that I think they underrate the state of excitement that exists at this time in the southern States. And while I belong, Mr. Clerk, to a minority here, and while I cannot expect that the sentiments to which I shall give utterance will meet the approval of either of the dominant parties in this House, I beg leave to call the attention of the House to what I regard as the alarming crisis that exists in the history of our beloved land. I wish to do this temperately and moderately. I wish to do it in a spirit of perfect respect to every gentleman of the North and of the South. When we look to the South, we find a state of excitement there that is in accordance with past events. What do we find on the part of a considerable and highly respectable number of the southern States of this Union? Is it not something like a determination to precipitate a crisis? For one, I do not agree either with the extremists of the North or with the extremists of the South. When you look at the history of parties in this country, it is an undeniable fact that nullification had its origin in South Carolina; and from that day to the present the spirit of nullification, of secession, of disunion, has never slept or slumbered. The snake of nullification has been scotched, not killed. That feeling existed during the lifetime of its great leader; and one of the last letters he ever wrote—his letter to Colonel Tarpey—was one in which a meeting or organization of the southern States was recommended. In addition to that, we have had further proceedings on the part of the South which, I trust, cannot command the approbation of a majority of patriots in the country. With all that, not only did the spirit of nullification display itself in 1832, but it has continued to exist since that time, in various forms and shapes, which I will not now take time to portray.

A spirit of discord exists between the extremes of this Union. This was met, and in my humble judgment is properly condemned, in the resolution which has been offered by the gentleman from North Carolina, [Mr. GILMER.]

I do not propose, in any remarks I shall make upon this occasion, to enter into anything like an elaborate discussion of these subjects; but I think it may not be improper to call the attention of the House to some of the facts which cannot have faded from their recollection. We all know that although the spirit of nullification was for the time being quieted by the strong and energetic measures of General Jackson, yet every occasion in which hostility to this Union could be manifested, since that memorable period, has been seized. No

longer ago than 1850, a state of things existed which was unexampled in the history of the country, unless it may have been in the Congress of 1820, when the hearts of patriotic men from every section of the Union were alarmed and excited in reference to the probable result which preceded the assembling of a southern convention in June, 1850, and the reassembling of the same convention at Nashville, at a subsequent period in the same year.

The compromise measures, as we all know, were the result of the patriotic action upon the part of the great leaders of the various political parties of this country. We all remember what the great Webster said in reference to the sleepless nights which he passed in the consideration of those questions. We all know how in the most unusual and remarkable manner Mr. Fillmore, the President of the Union and champion, so to speak, of the Whig party of this country, received compliments such as were scarcely ever bestowed in modern times. He received them not only from members of his own party, distinguished as statesmen in their day, but from those who warmly opposed his election and who had done everything in their power to embarrass his administration.

The same parties which, in 1850, had pledged themselves that the Union should exist no longer, have now, from the force of circumstances, received an additional impetus; and our object now should be to arrest its progress, to allay the excitement which so unfortunately for the country we find existing when we assemble here.

And that same feeling of disunion which existed in 1850 in a portion of the southern States, not only existed at the time when the southern convention assembled in that year, but it has existed from the days of nullification down to the present period. It was "unbent and unbroken" no longer ago than in 1858, when the letter of Mr. Yancey, of Alabama, was published, adverting to, or recommending, the organization of a league of united southerners, the object of which was, as I believe, to dissolve the Union. I shall not, under existing circumstances, go into a history of their principles, many of which existed in and grew out of this feeling of dissatisfaction with the Union as it existed, which feeling has been nourished for a series of years upon the part of a portion of the southern States, and has been developed in various modes, not important now to recapitulate.

And when we look North, are their skirts clear? When we look North, are there no sentiments of that kind existing there? Is there nothing to correspond with the Vicksburg convention, which was held no longer ago than in the month of May, 1859? When we look to the South, we see a feeling of dissatisfaction with the Union manifesting itself upon all occasions and under all circumstances. Is there no feeling of that kind upon the part of a portion of the North? Why, sir, since I came into this House I have heard sentiments attributed to northern men which, it seems to me, equal anything that has been said at the South; sentiments which I regret to notice, and in which I trust no large portion of our northern brethren here agree. I will call the attention of the House to a few extracts lately published, showing the circumstances under which we have

assembled here, and the necessity there exists for wise and moderate counsels upon our part. I will read, in addition to what was read by one gentleman from Virginia, one or two extracts:

"There is a higher law than the Constitution which regulates our authority over the domain. Slavery must be abolished, and we must do it."

That sentiment is ascribed to WILLIAM H. SEWARD. The next extract is taken from the New York Tribune:

"The time is fast approaching when the cry will become too overpowering to resist. Rather than tolerate national slavery as it now exists, let the Union be dissolved at once, and then the sin of slavery will rest where it belongs."

The next sentiment which I will read is ascribed to Joshua R. Giddings, formerly a member of Congress. It is:

"I look forward to the day when there shall be a servile insurrection in the South; when the black man, armed with British bayonets, and led on by British officers, shall assert his freedom, and wage a war of extermination against his master. And though we may not mock at their calamity, nor laugh when their fear cometh, yet we will hail it as the dawn of a political millennium."

Mr. HUTCHINS. I suppose that the gentleman from Tennessee has heard that Mr. Giddings has, over and over again, denied the utterance of that sentiment when he was—

A MEMBER. On this very floor.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes; and in his published communications to the country.

Mr. COX. Yes; but the gentleman knows that he has never taken back the spirit of it.

Mr. LEAKE. I undertake to say, that years ago, when I was a member of this House, I heard him utter the sentiment.

Mr. COX. It can be found in the Appendix to the Congressional Globe, as modified; but the spirit is the same exactly as that read by the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. NELSON. I have no desire to do injustice to any gentleman; and, therefore, I will give the authority for my statement. It is the Democratic Standard, a paper of which I know nothing, but which has been sent to my address since I came here. The date of the paper is November 26, 1859.

Several MEMBERS. Where is it published?

Mr. NELSON. It is published at Concord, New Hampshire. I find various other sentiments of the same character here. This sentiment is ascribed to Horace Greeley:

"I have no doubt but the free and slave States ought to be separated." * * * "The Union is not worth supporting in connection with the South."

And here is a sentiment ascribed to another northern gentleman. I am so little acquainted with any of the members of this House, that I really am unable to say at this moment whether the gentleman is a member of this House or not. Unless my impressions are erroneous, he was at one time a member of this House. It is Mr. ANSON P. BURLINGAME. [Laughter.] This sentiment is ascribed to him; and if he never gave utterance to it, why, of course, I have no desire to do him injustice:

"The times demand, and we must have, an anti-slavery Constitution, an anti-slavery Bible, and anti-slavery God."

Now, Mr. Clerk, without taking up the time of the House with reading other extracts of the same kind, I will state that my object in adverting to them is to show that, as we all know, we have

in this Union extremists at the North and extremists at the South. I could multiply extracts. There was a time in the history of this land when the Hartford convention stunk in the nostrils of the American people; when the man who cried out disunion or secession was regarded at least as a moral traitor to his country. Those halcyon days have passed away, and now what once struck the public mind with horror, what once was regarded as worthy almost of death, is a sentiment which seems to meet with a response in the North and with an utterance in the South. I, for one, Mr. Clerk, am opposed to this feeling of disunion, no matter whence it comes. [Prolonged applause in the galleries and upon the floor.] I, for one, am opposed to this slavery agitation, no matter whether it comes from the South or from the North. [Renewed applause.]

It seems to me that there is very little for us to contend about. I come from a slave State, and, although I am not a man of wealth, I own a few slaves, and am not ashamed to say it here. I say, sir, that I am opposed to this sentiment, no matter whence it comes or by whom it is given utterance. I do think that we, or rather the two great parties of the land, are fighting a battle altogether in advance of the time. To borrow the idea, though I cannot quote the language of that eminent and distinguished man, Mr. Webster, the question of slavery has been practically settled in regard to much the greater portion of this Union. It has been settled, as he in substance said, by the laws of nature and by the laws of climate. By the action of the people it has been settled since in regard to Kansas and Nebraska. It cannot reasonably be expected to exist in Utah. The people of California have settled it for themselves. Where, then, are we to have this contest in regard to slavery? Why this agitation? If there is any portion of this wide land in regard to which the question of slavery can be appropriate, it must be Arizona; and I take it for granted that it will be some years before Arizona will apply for admission into the American Union. Why this agitation, then? Why this unnatural excitement? Why, before we have fairly seated ourselves in the Hall of the House of Representatives, spring a firebrand into our deliberations? Why indulge in erimination and recrimination? Why this asperity of feeling? Why shall we not enter upon an organization of the House, and come up to the expression of the sentiment, which, I trust, is common to us all, that this slavery agitation is profitless and useless—common to us all, I mean, except it may be the ultra men of the North and the ultra men of the South.

And, Mr. Clerk, there is one remarkable thing which I should have stated a moment ago. I will say it now. There is one remarkable thing of these disunionists, North and South. What is it? I state it for the purpose of respectfully submitting that there is something wrong on both sides. What is it? Why that, whilst they disagree on the subject of slavery and various other subjects, they unite in agreeing upon a dissolution of the Union as a common remedy for antagonistic evils. I state this as the clearest and most conclusive proof that this slavery agitation should cease. Unless I am misinformed, there are no places where this question can arise, except in Arizona or in the admission of the States which at

some future period may be carved out of Texas. In reference to the latter, the question was settled by the Texas annexation resolutions, and we must cast ourselves upon the integrity and forbearance and moderation of the North not to repeal those resolutions, for it was most unfortunate for the country that the compromise measures of 1820 and 1850 were repealed. I say this without intending personally to reflect upon any gentleman.

I know that many patriotic men of the North and South voted under a mistake for the Kansas-Nebraska bill of 1854; but, so far as the peace and prosperity and safety of this Union are concerned, I regard it as the most unfortunate thing that ever happened in our history. The repeal of the great compromise which had stood for more than thirty years, had the effect to increase the forces against southern interests in the North. The repeal of that compromise and the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill had the effect, as gentlemen have in substance stated, to sweep the Democratic party from power in the North. It is an unfortunate thing in our history, and is to be deeply deplored, that those measures of peace and harmony—the compromise measures of 1820 and 1850—were repealed; and, when it is remarked that the Republican party has grown into the most powerful party in this Union, I might say to some of the gentlemen of the South that they cannot reply—

“Thou can’st not say I did it.”

It is owing to the course pursued by the great Democratic party in times past that this Republican party of the North has swelled in proportions, and has now got to be the most powerful party in the Union.

I do not mean, Mr. Clerk, at this stage of our proceedings, to enter further into this subject than to say that the Democratic platforms of 1840, 1844, 1848, and 1852, every one of them; on the subject of slavery, was a Delphic oracle, holding one language to the North and another to the South. We all know, who know anything about the history of the country, that the leaders of modern Democracy were unwilling in their platforms from 1840 to 1856, to say one word upon the subject of slavery in the Territories, and that those platforms are silent as death in regard to it.

And, sir, without intending to enter into the history of the proceedings in our country, I make one further remark here before I proceed. We who were of the Whig party of that day succeeded in electing that gallant old soldier, General Taylor, as President of the United States, and he was succeeded by Mr. Fillmore, and never since the days of George Washington has there been a President who demeaned himself more faithfully and more honorably in his high office than Millard Fillmore; [enthusiastic applause in the gallery:] a man who, though a northern man, doubtless entertaining northern prejudices against slavery, saw fit to stand up to his oath and his duty, and who, in the discharge of that oath and duty nobly, manfully, and patriotically executed the laws of the country, at the risk of destroying his popularity among his own fellow-citizens. I say if we ever had a man in this land who deserves the lasting gratitude of his country, Millard Fillmore is that man. [Renewed applause in the galleries.]

Mr. NOELL. Why was it that Mr. Fillmore was defeated by the Northern Whig party after he had served his first term?

Mr. NELSON. I do not know, unless it was because they had learned bad habits from their associations with the fire-eaters of the South. [Laughter on the floor and in the galleries.] While Mr. Fillmore manfully, patriotically, and nobly discharged his duty in regard to the fugitive slave law and everything else; ay, while he removed Abolitionists from office, and would not allow them to have place and power in order to advance their views, all here who know the history of the country—and it is presumed that every one present does—will remember that, when the great Democratic party assembled in 1852, and passed those celebrated resolutions, including the stereotyped resolutions of 1798, it was reported in the newspapers of the country that they pledged themselves that if Pierce was elected President of the United States, the Free-Soilers should come in as sharers of the spoils; and we all know that SUMNER was elected United States Senator by a coalition between the Democrats and Free-Soilers of Massachusetts; and we further remember that Chase, of Ohio, was elected to a seat in the Senate in a similar way. We know also that Judge Bronson, of New York, was removed from the collectorship of the port of New York because he would not carry out the views of the Administration in his appointments—views previously promulgated by John Van Buren and other delightful interpreters of those Delphic resolutions. [Laughter.]

I might pursue this train of thought and bring up other reminiscences of our country's history; but, having no desire to wound the feelings of any one here present, or to create any improper excitement upon the part of any gentleman, either North or South, I forbear. The object of passing the resolution of the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. GILMER] is to allay excitement, and to banish, so far as we can, profitless slavery agitation from this Congress, before which no measure, so far as I know, in regard to slavery is likely to come.

Before I take my seat, I trust the House will indulge me in giving utterance to one or two old fashioned sentiments which, in days past and gone, were common to the whole American people. It may excite the derision of a portion of the disunionists of the North, and it may provoke the contempt of the fire-eaters of the South; but I say there is one class of sentiments which, although the leaders in the excitement may strive to create a feeling of discord in the minds of our citizens, I trust all will hold in common. What are they? We love our country; we love its mountains, its hills, its valleys, and its streams; we love its peaceful Sabbaths, its church-going bells, its English Bible, and its glorious liberty of conscience. [Applause.] We love that feature in every American constitution which abolishes all hereditary honors and distinctions, and enables the poor man's child, if he have talent and genius, to climb

"The steep where fame's proud temple shines afar."

[Applause in the galleries.] We love the star-spangled banner which has waved in triumph over many a field of battle, and protects our commerce

upon every sea. We love the memory of the world's only Washington. [Applause on the floor and in the galleries.] We love the name and the fame of every hero who has fought or bled or died upon the battle fields of the country. [Renewed applause.] Of them it may be said:

"They fell devoted but undying,
The very gale their names seem sighing;
The waters murmur of their name,
The woods are peopled with their fame;
The silent pillar—lone and gray—
Claims kindred with their sacred clay;
Their memory sparkles o'er the fountain,
Their spirits wrap the dusky mountain;
The meanest rill—the mightiest river—
Rolls, mingling with their fame, forever!"

[Great applause in the galleries.]

We not only love these, but above all, I trust, we love this glorious Union, purchased by the blood and treasure and consecrated by the prayers of our fathers, and preserved by the valor of their children. We love this glorious Union, I repeat, and we want no abolition, no secession, no disunion, no nullification, no civil wars, no reeking carnage, no blazing fields, no burning cities, no military despots to arise and bid

"The blood-red paths of conquest hail."

No, sir, no; we want none of this—none of these; but we desire to live on as we have lived in times past, a free and a united people; one in mind, one in heart, one in interest, one in feeling, one in all that makes a nation great, one in all that makes a people happy. [Great applause in the galleries.] I trust in God that these sentiments will fill and swell the American heart as long as the gliding streams tremble in the sunshine, leap joyously, and roll to their ocean home; as long as the blue mountains clap their hands or bathe their faces in the sky; as long as the God of our fathers shall lead us in perils to come, as he has led us in perils that are passed, by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

It is with sentiments such as these that, although my voice is unknown to fame; although I take, for the first time, my seat in a deliberative assembly, I would firmly, earnestly, yet respectfully, invoke gentlemen of the North and gentlemen of the South to come up and lay on the altar of our common country this distracting question, which does no good, which creates incessant excitement, which arms the slave against his master, which causes a feeling of dissatisfaction toward this great and glorious Union to prevail. I ask northern men—can you, on an abstract question like this, make no sacrifice in behalf of our country? I ask southern men—can you, on a question like this, which is practically settled, at least for years to come, make no sacrifice? and can we not all agree in adopting this resolution, patriotic in its terms; a resolution which I am sure will commend itself to the approbation of the whole country, and which carries no sting in regard to any member of this assembly?

I then say, Mr. Clerk, without occupying further the time of the House, that I advocate the adoption of this resolution; and I call on gentlemen of this House, abler, older, having more experience than myself, I call upon them to rally to the standard of our country; to come up and let us link our shields together in behalf of this Union and our beloved institutions, and endeavor as far as in us lies to hand down unimpaired and undi-

minated, to our remotest posterity, those blessings of evil and religious freedom which we enjoy above all other nations under heaven. [Loud applause.]

After a speech from Mr. PRYOR—

Mr. NELSON said: I did not exactly understand the character of the remarks of the gentleman from Virginia in his opening, but I have simply to say that so far as I am concerned I do not belong to that class of gentlemen who adopt the code of dueling as their mode of settling disputes; nor am I in the habit of indulging in menace or bravado. I will only add, however, that in any thing I have said, or may say, I am competent to protect myself against any assault either in the House or out of it. [Applause on the Republican and American side of the House and in the galleries.]

Mr. PRYOR. I will not violate parliamentary decorum. I say to the gentleman that he may dismiss his apprehensions; I am not going to assault him. [Laughter and applause.]

Mr. NELSON I have no apprehension either from the person or from the arguments of the gentleman, if anything he has said can be dignified by the name of argument. But he seems to be in the habit of talking so much in the dark that I confess I am at a loss to understand the bearing of his remarks. I understood the gentleman in one breath to associate me and the party to which I belong with the Black Republican party of the North—

Mr. PRYOR. I am sure no such remark escaped me. I particularly and gladly disconnected him from the other members of the southern Opposition.

Mr. NELSON. Precisely. Now, so far as the gentleman is concerned, and so far as any sentiments avowed by me in this House are concerned, I have said nothing which I desire to escape from. I have said nothing here which I am not ready to defend, and nothing that I have not substantially avowed before my constituents.

Mr. PRYOR. Permit me to say, and just here, in order that I may not be brought to occupy a false position, that I did not in my argument attempt to impeach the gentleman's patriotism; on the contrary, I expressly admitted it.

Mr. NELSON. Then I have no desire to reply to anything the gentleman has said personally; but there are some of his remarks which I think require correction at my hands. The gentleman spoke of my being a member of the so-called American party, as if that were a reproach and dishonor.

So far as I am concerned, I glory in having been a member of the American party. [Applause.] I have avowed it before my constituents, and I am not ashamed to avow it before the whole land. I believe that party was a noble party in its aims and in its purposes. But I will not enter into a discussion of them here, further than to say that, as I understand, one of them was to protect the Protestant religion of this land against encroachment from any and every quarter; and the other was to protect the American Union from a dissolution. Those were two cardinal objects of the American party. There was nothing in them which conflicted with any previous sentiment which I ever entertained. Humble as I am, as the gentleman seems to have been inquiring into

my antecedents, I will tell him a little more, which will probably be as distasteful as the other. I claim not only to be an American, but to be a Whig, and to have been a Whig all my life. [Prolonged applause upon the floor and in the galleries.] I am opposed to the modern Democracy in every shape and under every form. [Renewed applause.] I have so said in other places, and I am not afraid to express it here. No, sir; no. But whilst the gentleman has been inquiring in regard to me, I must confess that I have not had the pleasure to ascertain much in regard to his antecedents. [Laughter.] If I mistake not, I have heard a sentiment of his, or one attributed to him, which I must say met with my hearty approbation—strange as the House may think it, that the gentleman and myself concur in one sentiment—a sentiment which he uttered while he was conducting a newspaper in this city, if he is correctly reported.

Mr. PRYOR. What have I done for which you praise me?

Mr. NELSON. You used that memorable expression, which was stereotyped in many of our southern papers, and with which we did good service in the contest in Tennessee—that “from the by-ways and highways of the Government the rottenness of corruption sends forth an insufferable stench. Why are the people so patient? Why slumbers the indignation of the Democracy?” [Prolonged laughter and applause all over the House.] Sir, in that sentiment I concur, and it delighted me when I heard it in Tennessee, for I thought the gentleman talked like a man of sense. Nothing has been said better by anybody in this Union.

But, Mr. Clerk, the gentleman says that he worships the Constitution, and that I came here to make a speech in behalf of the American Union, and that I do not say one word in regard to the Constitution. If I mistake not it is the common sentiment of the secessionists of the South, that they talk about the Constitution and say nothing about the Union. When I talk about the Union what do I talk about? I talk about that thing which is the result of the American Constitution. [Loud applause upon the floor and in the galleries.] I speak of the larger idea. When I say that I am in favor of the Union, that carries everything along with it. It carries the Constitution with it; and it carries everything else with it that any patriot in this land should desire to support.

Mr. BONHAM. The honorable member then puts the Union above the Constitution.

Mr. NELSON. I put the Union and the Constitution together, because the one cannot exist without the other. [Loud and protracted applause.]

Mr. KEITT. And there the Republicans differ with you.

Mr. NELSON. I told you, gentlemen of the House, when I addressed you before, that I did not expect that my sentiments would meet with the approbation of extreme men from the North or extreme men from the South. [Applause.] It makes no difference to me whether the Republicans and myself differ in regard to that sentiment. I believe that it is a patriotic sentiment. I believe that it is the sentiment of a large majority of the American people, and therefore it rejoices me to give utterance to it here.

The gentleman says that my language here tends to disunion. What have I said here to-day that associates me, or my party, with those who are called Black Republicans of the North? The whole purport of the remarks I made, and I knew the peril of the position I placed myself in, was to denounce these extreme sentiments of disunion, no matter who they come from, whether from nullifiers of the South, or Abolitionists of the North. [Applause.]

The gentleman talks of representation of southern sentiment. If he is a nullifier; if he is a secessionist, if he is a disunionist, I beg leave to say that I do not believe he represents the true sentiment of the South. God forbid it! [Prolonged and loud applause in the galleries, and upon the floor.] No, sir; I do not believe that the great body of the people of the South, even those of old Virginia, wedded as she is to the straight-jacket resolutions of '98, [laughter,] sympathize with the sentiment of disunion that is so continually iterated and reiterated from one end of the land to the other. No, sir; I think better of the South; at any rate, so far as my constituents are concerned, and so far as the gallant people of my native State are concerned—the State of Tennessee—I can stand proudly before my country, and say that I believe there is not one of them—not one—who sympathizes in this disunion sentiment. [Applause.]

Mr. PRYOR. I want to understand the gentleman distinctly. What would he, as a Representative from the South, do in the event of the election of a Black Republican President—Seward, for example?

Mr. NELSON. I speak for myself, and I do not undertake to speak for my colleagues, or for the party to which I belong. I declare it as my solemn conviction, much as I believe such an election ought to be deprecated, much as I would regret and deplore it, that yet, of itself, the election of a Black Republican President would not be cause for a dissolution of the Union, because I think we ought to wait until we see whether that Black Republican President would do anything hostile to the rights of the South. [Loud and prolonged applause.] I may just remark here that, much as I regretted the election of Mr. Banks, as Speaker of this House, a man whom I never saw, and of whom I know nothing except so far as the history of that election is concerned, I did not see that the election of Mr. Banks brought about a dissolution of the Union. I do not want any gentleman, either from the North, South, East, or West, to suppose that I desire the election of either a Black Republican President or a Black Republican Speaker. I do not desire it, and I am sure I have not coöperated with anybody in the election of a black Republican Speaker.

Mr. PRYOR. The question I propounded has been answered only in a general sense. I repeat the inquiry whether that gentleman, upon his own responsibility, and not as the representative of anybody else, would be willing that WILLIAM H. SEWARD should take possession of the Army, the Navy, and all the powers of the Government?

Mr. NELSON. Of course I would not. I would deplore such a thing.

Mr. PRYOR. The gentleman will excuse me. I mean all the constitutional powers of the Pres-

ident of the United States. Would he allow WILLIAM H. SEWARD to take possession of those powers, or would he resist it even to the extent of going out of the Union?

Mr. NELSON. In answer to that question, let me say that I do not believe from the manner in which Mr. SEWARD has expressed himself, that there is any danger that such a contingency will ever happen. But even if he should be elected President of the United States according to the Constitution and the forms of law, the view I entertain—and I speak for no one but myself—is, that that is of itself no cause for a dissolution of the Union, unless he committed some overt act leading to peril of the South. The moment he did commit any such overt act, why, sir, I would be willing, humble as I am, to link my shield to the shield even of these secessionists, to repel the wrong just as soon as I would repel wrong from any quarter.

The gentleman from Virginia [Mr. PRYOR] represents me as having said that there was no danger of a dissolution of the Union at present. Sir, I did not intend to make use of any such language as that, and I think the gentleman is certainly mistaken. I do think there is great and imminent danger; I think the perils which surround us now are more threatening than they have been at any former period; and, as I remarked before, while I do not concur in the sentiments expressed here on all hands from the South; while I regard it as natural that there should be excitement; the whole scope of my remarks, so far as anything I could say would go, was to allay this feverish excitement and bring about feelings of harmony and concord among members of the House. I do not wish to be misunderstood or misrepresented in regard to anything I may have said. I spoke of this infamous book of Helper's in denunciatory terms, and I will go as far as any man in the country in denouncing the miscreant who would publish such a document as he has published, and in denouncing the wretches who attempted to invade the State of Virginia, and were guilty of the outrages and horrible conduct which have been described in the newspapers and which have been adverted to here. I go as far, and I believe the party I am associated with here do go as far, as any party in the Union, in denouncing that thing.

But is that thing itself a cause for a dissolution of the Union? Why, sir, there are more things in regard to it which ought to be known. I saw it stated in the newspapers—although many of the South who are disposed to disunion do not quote from northern papers—things that have been spoken there in regard to this matter in the city of New York and elsewhere—that only five pulpits out of five hundred uttered sentiments in favor of that execrable man who was executed the other day in Virginia; and although I think the aspect of things is threatening, and I very much deplore it, this shows to my mind, what I believe to be true, that although it suits the aims of politicians to advocate a dissolution of the Union, the great body of the American people everywhere are sound upon that question. [Applause in the galleries and from the Republican benches.] The gentleman from Virginia has said that I have planted myself in the ranks of the Black Republicans. I deny it. I have not voted for a Repub-

lican for Speaker, nor has any man from the party to which I belong done so. Not one. We have not seen fit to vote for the Democratic candidate. I suppose that in this great country of ours we are freemen, and have the right to represent what we believe to be the sentiments of our constituents, and I, for one, will coöperate in the election of any man as Speaker of this body whom I believe to be a national man, and whom I believe will faithfully discharge the duties of the office. That is the view I entertain in regard to that matter, and I deny the soft impeachment of Republicanism, which has been made upon the other side.

There is a wide difference between the conservative sentiments to which I have given utterance here to-day, and the infuriated statements expressed by some gentlemen who claim to be leaders of the whole South; and I trust that before the debate is closed men from the North will be found patriotic enough to get up here and say that they disavow the wild schemes of Wendell Phillips and Garrison and that class of men—that they disavow, repudiate, and scorn them, just as much as I scorn and repudiate the disunion doctrines of the secessionists of the South. I trust there is patriotism enough in the House and in the country to bring forward such an expression of sentiment.

The gentleman says that the Republicans cheered me for the remarks I made here. All I have to say to that is, that so far as I am concerned, whether the applause comes from the Republicans of the North, or from the South Americans, as we are called, or from the conservative men anywhere, I thank God there is still an expression of sentiment here in behalf of this great and glorious Union. [Applause from the galleries and the Republican benches.] I trust that that feeling of love to the American Union will expand and enlarge among the members of this assembly till there will be a healthful spirit of action among us, and till we can, in a peaceful, quiet, constitutional, legal manner, effect the organization of this House, and give peace and repose to this distracted land. I trust that that sort of feeling will prevail; and whether applause in behalf of the Union comes from the North or from the South, I welcome it as a happy and glorious omen in these perilous times. [Renewed applause.]

The gentleman spoke of my having been a member of the American party. Well, Mr. Clerk, in regard to the growth of that sentiment at the

North, I have nothing to say; but if, after the organization of the House, that gentleman desires to break a lance with me on the question of Americanism, I trust I shall be able to defend any position that I occupy. If I understand any question, I think I understand that question of Americanism. One of the greatest sins committed by the Democratic party was its unlimited encouragement to the immigration of foreigners, many of whom were told, before they left Ireland, in what part of the American Union to stop, and they had marked down for them the northern States, where slavery did not exist. But let that pass.

I must confess, Mr. Clerk, that I am at a loss to follow the remarks of the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. PRYOR,] for it seems to me that there was no point—with great deference to him—in anything he said, [laughter;] no argument; no logical sequence; nothing tangible that we could lay our hands upon, so as to make an argument with him. I must, therefore, notice it just as it comes up. He remarked that he would arrest us as fugitives and interrupt our game.

Mr. PRYOR. I meant by that, not the other Representatives of the southern Opposition, but the gentleman and his most intimate associates—the Republicans.

Mr. NELSON. So far as that remark is concerned, I must say that if the gentleman means to say that I have had any personal alliance or association with the Black Republicans, I repel here, as a foul calumny, the imputation that I have any such association; for I never had such an association in my life, and I have never courted such an association. I have had no coöperation with that party. There has been no proposition of any kind going from me, or from the party to which I belong, to the Republican party in this House, as far as I have any knowledge or information. I have had no part nor lot with them in this matter; nor do I know of any gentleman in the party to which I belong who has. I disavow it for myself, and I disavow it for them.

As to the applause of my sentiments, I repeat that it makes no difference from what quarter applause comes; and I earnestly hope that long after you and I, and all of us, have passed away from the stage of human action; ay, sir, long after this proud Capitol in which we stand shall have moldered in the dust, I trust in God there will be countless millions in this happy and glorious land who will applaud such sentiments as I have given utterance to in behalf of the Union!